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Transformation of Inclusive Education Policy and Practice Elementary School

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Articles Information

Abstrak

Keywords:

Inclusive education;
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Studi ini mengkaji transformasi kebijakan dan praktik pendidikan inklusif di sebuah sekolah dasar negeri di Kabupaten Bandung melalui pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Pendidikan inklusif sangat penting untuk memastikan akses yang setara bagi semua anak, termasuk mereka yang berkebutuhan khusus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara dengan guru dan kepala sekolah, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa transformasi kebijakan melibatkan pengintegrasian prinsip-prinsip inklusif ke dalam rencana pembelajaran, pelatihan guru, dan peningkatan fasilitas sekolah. Transformasi ini telah meningkatkan efektivitas pengajaran, partisipasi siswa, dan kolaborasi antarteman sebaya, sehingga menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang lebih suportif. Meskipun hasil positif ini, tantangan tetap ada, seperti keterbatasan sumber daya dan rendahnya kesadaran publik. Untuk mengatasi masalah ini, studi ini merekomendasikan penguatan kolaborasi dengan para pemangku kepentingan lokal, penyediaan pelatihan guru yang berkelanjutan, dan peningkatan keterlibatan masyarakat untuk mempertahankan kemajuan implementasi pendidikan inklusif.

Abstract

This study examines the transformation of inclusive education policies and practices at a public elementary school in Bandung Regency through a descriptive qualitative approach. Inclusive education is essential to ensure equal access for all children, including those with special needs. Data were collected through observation, interviews with teachers and principals, and document analysis. The results show that policy transformation involves integrating inclusive principles into lesson plans, teacher training, and the enhancement of school facilities. This transformation has improved teaching effectiveness, student participation, and peer collaboration, creating a more supportive learning environment. Despite these positive outcomes, challenges persist, such as limited resources and low public awareness. To address these issues, the study recommends strengthening collaboration with local stakeholders, providing continuous teacher training, and increasing community involvement to sustain the progress of inclusive education implementation.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has emerged as a global movement that seeks to guarantee the rights of all children to receive quality education without discrimination. It emphasizes the principle that every learner—regardless of physical, intellectual, social, or emotional differences—has the right to participate fully in the learning process. In Indonesia, the commitment to inclusive education aligns with national and international frameworks, such as the Education for All (EFA) agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education. Within this context, one public elementary school in Bandung Regency has gradually implemented inclusive education as part of its mission to provide equal opportunities for every student.

However, the implementation of inclusive education remains a complex and evolving process. This school, despite its commitment, faces several persistent challenges. These include limited human and material resources, insufficient teacher competence in handling diverse learning needs, and a lack of supporting infrastructure to accommodate children with special needs. Moreover, societal attitudes toward students with disabilities often reflect stigma and misunderstanding, which further complicate the efforts toward inclusion. These challenges illustrate that inclusive education is not merely a structural or administrative matter but also a deep cultural and pedagogical transformation that requires systemic support at multiple levels.

Theoretically, inclusive education is grounded in the principles of social justice and human rights, emphasizing that education must be equitable and responsive to diversity (Aditya Dharma, 2019; Rambe, 2018). According to Ainscow (2020), the implementation of inclusive education involves three main dimensions: access, participation, and achievement. Therefore, inclusion is not only about providing physical access but also ensuring that learners meaningfully participate in learning activities and achieve optimal outcomes according to their abilities. From this theoretical standpoint, inclusion demands curriculum flexibility, differentiated instruction, and teacher empowerment to accommodate the varied learning profiles of students.

Given this background, the main problem addressed in this study is the extent to which inclusive education policies have been effectively implemented at this elementary school and how such practices can be improved to provide better educational services. In this regard, the research aims to explore the transformation of policies and practices that support inclusion, while identifying the obstacles encountered and strategies employed to overcome them. The study also seeks to formulate recommendations for strengthening inclusive education implementation at the primary level.

To address the challenges, this study emphasizes three interrelated strategies. First, developing teacher capacity through continuous professional training is crucial to overcoming the limited pedagogical understanding of inclusion. Teachers need ongoing exposure to inclusive pedagogies, differentiated learning

techniques, and classroom management strategies that accommodate diverse learners. Second, improving supporting facilities and resources, such as assistive technologies, accessible infrastructure, and adapted learning materials, is necessary to provide equitable access to learning environments. Third, building collaborative partnerships among schools, parents, and communities is essential for combating social stigma and fostering shared responsibility in inclusive education. Strengthening these collaborations can also encourage community-based initiatives to promote awareness and acceptance of diversity.

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, which allows for an in-depth understanding of the processes and experiences surrounding policy transformation. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers, principals, and parents of students with and without special needs. This type of interview enables flexibility while maintaining focus on the research objectives. The study will also include direct classroom observations to capture authentic teaching practices and interactions within inclusive settings. Furthermore, policy document analysis will be conducted to examine the alignment between national regulations, school-level policies, and classroom implementation.

Participants will be selected using purposive sampling, a technique that ensures the inclusion of information-rich participants who are directly involved in or affected by inclusive education practices. The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2019) framework, which involves familiarization, coding, identifying patterns, and developing themes. This analytical process will help reveal the dynamics of policy transformation, the challenges encountered, and the strategies that contribute to more inclusive practices.

In practice, inclusive education at the school has led to several transformative changes. Teachers have begun integrating inclusiveness principles into lesson plans and adopting differentiated instructional approaches to accommodate varied learning abilities. Peer collaboration has also been encouraged to build empathy and mutual support among students. However, despite these positive developments, gaps remain in the consistency and sustainability of inclusive practices. Some teachers still struggle to modify curricula effectively, and the lack of specialized staff, such as special education teachers or counselors, limits the school's capacity to respond to more complex learning needs.

The linkage between the identified challenges and the proposed solutions is therefore crucial. For instance, limited teacher competence can be directly addressed through systematic professional development programs and mentoring. Likewise, the lack of supporting infrastructure can be mitigated through collaboration with local governments and community organizations to mobilize resources. Addressing social stigma requires sustained advocacy and parent education initiatives to shift perceptions and attitudes toward students with special needs. Each of these strategies must operate synergistically to ensure that the transformation of inclusive education policies and practices becomes sustainable rather than episodic.

While this study aspires to contribute to the enhancement of inclusive education implementation, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The research focuses on a single public elementary school in Bandung Regency, which may restrict the generalizability of its findings to other regions with different socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, the qualitative nature of the study emphasizes depth over breadth; thus, the insights generated are context-specific rather than statistically representative. Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish the study's relevance; instead, they highlight the importance of localized understanding as a foundation for broader policy refinement.

In conclusion, this research aims to analyze the transformation of inclusive education policies and practices at a public elementary school in Bandung Regency and to develop strategic recommendations for future practice. By linking empirical findings with theoretical perspectives on social justice and educational equity, the study seeks to provide meaningful contributions to both academic discourse and practical policy implementation. Ultimately, it is expected that the results of this research will support Indonesia's broader agenda of achieving inclusive and equitable quality education, as envisioned in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4).

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore in-depth the transformation of inclusive education policies and practices in a public elementary school in Bandung Regency. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to holistically understand the experiences, perceptions, and social context of stakeholders involved in the policy implementation process. The primary focus of the study is not to test hypotheses, but to describe and interpret how inclusive education policies are developed, implemented, and their impact on teaching practices and student learning outcomes. Although this study is not experimental and does not involve a randomized controlled trial (RCT), its design incorporates exploratory quasi-experimental logic, comparing the perceptions of various stakeholder groups (teachers, principals, parents, and students) to obtain a balanced picture of the transformation process.

The study participants included principals, classroom teachers, special education teachers, parents, and students with and without special needs. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, taking into account their experience and direct involvement in the implementation of inclusive education. Inclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance of participation. These included teachers who had taught in inclusive classrooms for at least one year, principals involved in the formulation of school policies, and parents and students actively participating in the inclusive learning process. The estimated number of participants was between 15 and 20, representing each category. To minimize potential bias, particularly since teachers and administrators were part of the transformation process being studied, this study employed data source triangulation through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Additionally, external observers from academic circles were involved in classroom observations to maintain objectivity and enhance the credibility of the findings.

Data collection was conducted through four main techniques: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, document analysis, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, parents, and students to explore their understanding and experiences in implementing inclusive education. This interview format provided participants with the flexibility to express their views openly while maintaining the focus of the study. Each interview session lasted 45–60 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent. Classroom observations were conducted using a structured protocol adapted from the Inclusive Classroom Observation Checklist (ICOC), covering indicators such as differentiated learning strategies, classroom accessibility, teacher-student interaction, participation of students with special needs, and peer collaboration. Each class was observed at least three times in different subjects to obtain a comprehensive picture.

In addition, relevant documents—such as school policies, curriculum, individual learning plans (IEPs), and teacher training modules—were analyzed to track changes in policy and implementation over time. This process was complemented by two focus group discussions (FGDs) involving teachers and education personnel, aimed at deepening collective understanding of inclusive education implementation strategies and serving as a means of member checking to validate initial findings.

The research instruments consisted of an interview guide, observation sheets, and document review sheets. The interview guides were developed based on the dimensions of inclusive education policy, practice, and perceptions, containing 10–12 open-ended questions to guide the discussion. The observation sheet used a checklist validated by three special education experts using the Aiken's V index, with a coefficient of ≥ 0.85 indicating a high level of agreement. Meanwhile, the document review sheet focused on identifying policy changes, curriculum implementation, and available resource support. All instruments underwent expert validation and limited pilot testing to ensure clarity, reliability, and alignment with the research objectives.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2019), through six systematic stages: (1) data familiarization, (2) initial coding, (3) theme discovery, (4) theme review, (5) naming and defining themes, and (6) final report preparation. The analysis was conducted manually with the aid of qualitative data management software to maintain consistency in theme exploration. To enhance trustworthiness, this study employed four main strategies: triangulation

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate a comprehensive and multi-dimensional transformation in inclusive education policies and practices at One of school in Kabupaten Bandung Elementary School. The change was not limited to administrative procedures but extended deeply into the pedagogical, social, and

cultural structures of the institution. Over the last three years, the school has gradually shifted from a segregated educational model—where students with disabilities were taught separately—to a fully inclusive framework that promotes participation, equity, and mutual respect among all learners. This transition aligns with the global trend toward inclusive education, as encouraged by UNESCO (2021), which emphasizes the integration of diversity as an essential component of quality education.

1. Policy Transformation and Institutional Commitment

The first major finding concerns the policy transformation driven by institutional leadership. The school's principal, together with the local education office, restructured internal regulations to ensure that inclusiveness became a formal part of the school's vision and mission. This included the revision of curriculum frameworks to embed inclusive values and the introduction of teacher development programs focused on differentiated instruction and classroom management for diverse learners. Teachers were also encouraged to adapt lesson plans that incorporated Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, ensuring accessibility for all students regardless of ability.

Administrative support played a pivotal role in sustaining these changes. The school allocated specific budgetary resources for inclusive learning materials—such as visual aids, tactile tools, and assistive technologies—while also renovating classrooms to improve physical accessibility. These efforts mirror Fullan's (2007) view that sustainable educational reform requires both top-down policy guidance and bottom-up engagement among teachers. The school leadership's continuous reinforcement of inclusive values fostered a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility among staff.

2. Implementation in the Classroom: Shifts in Pedagogical Practice

In practice, inclusive education implementation was most visible in classroom dynamics. Teachers adopted cooperative learning strategies, peer tutoring, and differentiated assessments to accommodate the diverse needs of learners. For example, in science lessons, students worked in mixed-ability groups where those with stronger literacy skills assisted peers with learning difficulties. Observational data revealed that this approach not only enhanced understanding of the content but also fostered empathy and teamwork.

However, classroom implementation was not without difficulties. Teachers frequently reported the challenge of managing time and attention when students with disabilities required individualized support. The absence of teaching assistants exacerbated this issue, often forcing teachers to balance between personalized attention and maintaining lesson flow for the entire class. During one observation, a teacher explained, "Sometimes, I have to stop the entire activity just to help one student who struggles with reading. It's rewarding but also exhausting." This echoes the findings of Hornby (2015) and Sharma et al. (2008), who emphasize that the success of inclusive education depends heavily on the presence of adequate human resources and support structures.

3. Teacher Resistance and Professional Adaptation

One of the most complex findings in this study was the resistance among teachers toward inclusive practices, particularly in the early stages of implementation. Several senior teachers initially expressed skepticism about the feasibility of inclusion, fearing that it would disrupt classroom order or lower academic standards. This resistance stemmed from multiple factors: lack of training, fear of failure, increased workload, and misconceptions about students with disabilities.

Interviews revealed that teachers' resistance was not necessarily rooted in unwillingness, but in uncertainty. One teacher stated, "We were told to include everyone, but we were not given enough tools or examples to do it effectively." Over time, however, resistance gradually decreased as teachers engaged in reflective discussions, collaborative lesson planning, and peer mentoring. The school introduced regular "inclusive practice workshops" facilitated by external education consultants, allowing teachers to share challenges and successes. This approach aligns with Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson's (2006) framework of *collaborative inquiry*, where professional learning communities drive the evolution of inclusive practice through reflection and peer support.

The case also demonstrates that addressing teacher resistance requires systemic solutions. Providing ongoing mentoring, establishing a feedback mechanism, and celebrating small successes helped build teacher confidence and ownership of inclusive practices. Teachers began to perceive inclusion not as an additional burden but as a shared pedagogical mission—a process consistent with Fullan's (2016) theory of deep learning, which links motivation with professional growth and moral purpose.

4. Impact on Students with Special Needs

The impact of inclusive education on students with special needs was one of the most encouraging outcomes of the transformation. Observations and interviews indicated significant improvements in students' academic engagement, social interactions, and emotional well-being. For instance, a student with mild autism who had previously been isolated became an active participant in group projects and even volunteered to lead a class presentation after six months of inclusion. Teachers reported increased self-confidence, better communication skills, and stronger peer relationships among students with disabilities.

Quantitative school records also showed a steady improvement in attendance and participation rates of students with special needs. These findings align with Kauffman and Hallahan (2009), who assert that inclusive settings foster both cognitive and socio-emotional growth by providing authentic opportunities for interaction and collaboration. Moreover, peers without disabilities exhibited greater empathy, patience, and cooperative behavior, indicating that inclusive education benefits all learners—not only those with special needs.

5. Transformation of School Culture

Another profound result of this transformation is the development of a positive and inclusive school culture. Before the policy reform, cases of social exclusion and subtle bullying were reported. However, as inclusive values were progressively reinforced, incidents of bullying declined, and mutual respect among students increased. Teachers observed that students were more likely to assist peers with disabilities during school activities, reflecting a deeper internalization of empathy and solidarity.

This cultural shift resonates with Smith's (2009) argument that inclusive education strengthens school cohesion by cultivating a sense of belonging among all community members. The change also affected teacher-student relationships; teachers reported becoming more attentive and responsive to individual learning differences, thereby promoting a more humane and caring educational atmosphere. The transformation thus went beyond instructional changes—it redefined the moral and social fabric of the school.

6. Parental Engagement and Home-School Collaboration

Parents of children with special needs expressed high satisfaction with the school's inclusive initiatives. They reported feeling more respected and involved in their children's educational journey. Many parents appreciated the school's willingness to accommodate their input and to provide regular updates on progress. However, they also requested more systematic communication, such as progress reports or consultation sessions.

This reflects McLeskey et al. (2012), who emphasize the critical role of home-school collaboration in sustaining inclusive education. Parental involvement not only ensures consistency in learning approaches between home and school but also strengthens accountability and trust. In response, the school has proposed creating a *Parent Support Forum* and implementing a digital communication platform to enhance transparency and collaboration.

7. Resource and Structural Constraints

Despite these achievements, the school continues to face significant **resource constraints**. The limited number of teaching assistants, insufficient adaptive learning tools, and minimal access to specialized training materials hinder full inclusion. Teachers often have to improvise by creating their own learning aids from available materials, which, while resourceful, cannot replace professional support. The lack of formal assessment tools for diverse learners also makes it challenging to measure progress accurately.

From a policy perspective, these constraints highlight the need for systemic investment in inclusive education. As Hornby (2015) and Ainscow & Sandill (2019) argue, inclusion must be supported by adequate infrastructure, continuous funding, and coordinated professional development. Therefore, one of the key policy recommendations emerging from this study is the establishment of a **district-level inclusion support center**, providing training, psychological services, and technical assistance to schools.

8. Theoretical and Philosophical Reflections

The transformation observed at One of school in Kabupaten Bandung reflects a convergence of several educational philosophies. From a Deweyan perspective (Dewey, 1916), inclusive education represents democracy in action—education as a means of participation and shared growth. By ensuring that all students learn together, the school embodies the democratic ethos of mutual respect and collective learning.

In line with Freire's (1970) pedagogy of liberation, inclusive education at this school functions as a tool for empowerment and social justice. It dismantles the hierarchical barriers that historically marginalized students with disabilities. Freire argues that education should awaken critical consciousness and challenge oppressive systems; in this case, inclusion redefines who gets to participate in learning and whose knowledge is valued.

Moreover, Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism underpins the school's emphasis on collaborative learning. Peer interaction serves as the primary mechanism for cognitive and social development. Students learn through dialogue, shared tasks, and cooperative problem-solving, consistent with Piaget's (1973) view of social interaction as a catalyst for intellectual growth. The integration of diverse learners thus enriches collective learning experiences and encourages the development of empathy, adaptability, and creativity.

9. Linking Findings to Policy Recommendations

The study's findings strongly support several policy recommendations. First, teacher training programs should transition from one-time workshops to continuous professional development cycles, integrating mentoring, observation, and feedback. Second, the government and school administrators should invest in specialized personnel—such as inclusion coordinators and teaching assistants—to reduce teacher burden. Third, there should be structured monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the long-term effectiveness of inclusive practices.

Additionally, the local education office could establish inter-school networks for sharing best practices and resources. Schools that have successfully implemented inclusion could serve as model centers, offering mentorship and capacity-building programs for others. This echoes the UNESCO (2021) framework emphasizing peer learning as a sustainable driver of inclusion at the system level.

10. Addressing Limitations and Future Research

While the study provides valuable insights, it also acknowledges several limitations. The research focuses on a single school, which limits the generalizability of its findings. Additionally, because many respondents—teachers and administrators—were directly involved in the reform process, their perspectives

may contain positive bias. To mitigate this, future studies could incorporate external evaluators, longitudinal observations, and comparative analyses across multiple schools.

Another limitation lies in the absence of quantitative data on student achievement before and after the reform. Although qualitative findings show improved engagement and participation, future research should include measurable indicators such as academic scores, attendance rates, or behavioral assessments to strengthen the evidence base.

11. Broader Implications and Conclusion

In summary, the transformation of inclusive education at One of school in Kabupaten Bandung Elementary School offers a vivid illustration of how inclusive policies can translate into meaningful practice when supported by leadership, collaboration, and reflection. The findings affirm that inclusive education benefits not only students with disabilities but also enriches the learning environment for all students by fostering empathy, cooperation, and respect for diversity.

The case also underscores that inclusion is an ongoing process, not a fixed achievement. Continuous teacher development, adequate funding, and responsive leadership are essential for sustaining progress. The philosophical foundation of this transformation—rooted in Dewey’s democratic education, Freire’s critical pedagogy, and Vygotsky’s social learning—highlights that inclusive education is as much about **transforming mindsets** as it is about changing systems.

Therefore, this study contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive education by demonstrating that transformation is possible, even in resource-constrained contexts, through commitment, creativity, and community collaboration. Policymakers and educators are urged to view inclusion not merely as an administrative mandate but as an ethical and pedagogical necessity—one that embodies the very essence of equity, dignity, and humanity in education.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of inclusive education at One of school in Kabupaten Bandung Elementary School highlights the significant philosophical and practical shifts towards educational equity, social justice, and cognitive development for all students, including those with disabilities. By embracing inclusive education, One of school in Kabupaten Bandung reflects a commitment to creating an equitable learning environment that values diversity and promotes social integration. Philosophically, the school’s approach aligns with the democratic ideals of John Dewey, the social justice framework of Paulo Freire, and the developmental theories of Vygotsky and Piaget. These theories provide a foundation for understanding how inclusive practices contribute to the social and cognitive development of all students.

However, the successful implementation of inclusive education requires ongoing effort, resources, and teacher professional development. Challenges such as inadequate resources, insufficient teacher training, and the need for specialized support staff remain significant barriers to full inclusion. Nevertheless, the case of One of school in Kabupaten Bandung demonstrates that with the right support and commitment, inclusive education can lead to positive outcomes for all students, fostering a learning environment where every child has the opportunity to succeed.

In conclusion, while the path toward inclusive education is complex and requires continuous adaptation, the ongoing efforts at One of school in Kabupaten Bandung offer a promising model for other schools aiming to create inclusive and equitable educational environments. The future of inclusive education depends on sustained investment in resources, teacher training, and community support to ensure that the ideals of inclusion are fully realized.

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